

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Saturday, 7th July, 2018

SPECIAL MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
Aldermen Browne, Convery, Haire and Spence; and
Councillors Attwood, Beattie, Campbell, Carson,
Garrett, Graham, Hutchinson, Long, McAteer, O'Donnell,
Reynolds and Walsh.

Also attended: Councillor Boyle.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mr. N. Grimshaw, Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McDonough-Brown) and Councillors Craig and McAllister.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The Committee agreed that the meeting be audio recorded.

Alderman Convery

Alderman Convery drew the Committee's attention to the fact that, as an Independent Member, he was not a member of the Bonfire Panel and had not, therefore, been briefed on the issues which were to be discussed at this meeting.

He confirmed that he wished to ensure that he was not associated with any information arising from the meeting which might be reported in the media and that it was his intention to withdraw from the meeting.

The Chief Executive explained that, since this series of special meetings were being called at short notice and information was often being received up until the start of each meeting, officers had no alternative but to table information.

She undertook to ensure that Alderman Convery would, in future, where practicable, be fully briefed.

Alderman Convery then withdrew from the meeting.

Restricted Item

The information relating to the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the Committee meeting during discussion of this item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

The Chairperson referred to the media coverage which had followed the Committee meeting on 5th July and drew the Members' attention to their responsibilities in relation to the reporting of restricted information.

THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEM IN PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(a)

Contingencies Relating to the Summer Months

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided the Committee with an update on the Bloomfield Walkway bonfire, including discussions which had taken place on the previous day with representatives of the Department for Infrastructure, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 5th July, it had agreed that she should write to the Executive Office and to the Northern Ireland Office to raise concerns around the invidious position being faced by councils in dealing with bonfire issues. The Committee had agreed also that the Department for Infrastructure should be advised of its decision to support the contingency arrangements which it was putting in place around the Bloomfield Walkway bonfire, by making the Council's contractor available and contributing to the costs of any works, as had been requested, and that it should be advised also of its responsibilities as the landowner and occupier.

She reported that a response had been received from the Northern Ireland Office, which had confirmed that the Secretary of State had no decision-making powers in relation to bonfires and that they were the responsibility of the locally devolved administration and statutory agencies, including councils. The response had confirmed also that decisions relating to the protection of property and life rested with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. She tabled for the Committee's consideration a draft response which she was proposing to forward to the Northern Ireland Office, which had highlighted, amongst other things, the need for decisions to be taken at a Governmental level, the Committee's concerns around the Bloomfield Walkway bonfire and the need for a strategic approach to be adopted for bonfires and related issues, to be led by the Northern Ireland Office and involving all relevant stakeholders.

The Chief Executive reported further that the Executive Office had indicated that, in the absence of a functioning administration, it was unable to address the issue of bonfires in the short-term and that the Department for Infrastructure had confirmed that it was still fully committed to protecting life and property around the Bloomfield Walkway bonfire.

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor Boyle raised a number of concerns on behalf of local residents in the Bloomfield Walkway area.

After a lengthy discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Attwood,
Seconded by Councillor Long,

That the Committee agrees that the letter of response, as tabled by the Chief Executive, be forwarded to the Northern Ireland Office.

On a vote by show of hands, nine Members voting for the proposal and six against, and it was declared carried.

The Committee agreed further:

- i. to continue to support the contingency arrangements being put in place by the Department for Infrastructure around the Bloomfield Walkway bonfire; and
- ii. that a special meeting of the Committee be held at 2.00 p.m. on Monday, 9th July to receive an update on this site.

The Committee noted that the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services would be putting in place contingency arrangements to protect staff over the coming days, should the need arise.

Call-in

The Committee agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (2) (c), that the decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council's or the public's interest.

Chairperson